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Former White House Official Sentenced to 30 months in Prison for Stealing more than \$500,000

WASHINGTON - Felipe E. Sixto, a former Associate Director at the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, was sentenced today to 30 months in prison for stealing \$579,274.47 in U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) funds from the Center for a Free Cuba (CFC) while he was employed as CFC's Chief of Staff and later while he was employed at the White House, announced U.S. Attorney Jeffrey A. Taylor and USAID Inspector General Donald A. Gambatesa.

Sixto, 29, who recently moved from Bethesda, Maryland to Miami, Florida, was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Reggie B. Walton, after pleading guilty in December 2008 to one count of theft from a program receiving federal funds. The Court also ordered that, following Sixto's release from prison, he be placed on three years of supervised release, and perform 250 hours of community service. In addition, the Court ordered Sixto to pay a fine of \$10,000.

According to the factual proffer agreed to by Sixto, between February 2003 and July 2007, Sixto was CFC's Chief of Staff. CFC is a non-profit institution that is now based in Arlington, Virginia. CFC's mission is to promote democracy in Cuba. USAID is a United States government agency that provides economic and humanitarian assistance around the world. CFC receives funds from USAID for, among other things, providing transistor radios and flashlights to Cuban citizens. CFC subcontracts with vendors to purchase this equipment. These entities routinely submit invoices to CFC for their expenses and receive reimbursement from CFC in the form of a check, mailed to them. As CFC's Chief of Staff, Sixto performed many of CFC's daily administrative activities, including overseeing procurement processes.

In the latter part of 2004 or early 2005, the executive director of CFC requested that Sixto research the pricing of radios from various vendors. Sixto, rather than recommending the lowest bid to CFC, devised a scheme in which, concealing his identity, he purchased radios and resold them to CFC at a profit to himself. As part of his scheme, which lasted from April 2005 through September 2007 and netted Sixto \$579,274.47, Sixto opened bank accounts, incorporated a company, used fictitious mailing addresses, rented storage space, and used an alias to communicate with CFC.

As set forth in the statement of offense, Sixto purchased radios and flashlights from the lowest priced vendor and delivered the equipment to CFC. He also delivered an inflated invoice issued from a fictitious corporation he created. After CFC's accountant and executive director signed off on the invoice and placed the check for the equipment in the outgoing mail, Sixto intercepted the mail and deposited the check into a bank account he opened for his corporation. For a period of time, Sixto also rented space at a storage facility in Frederick, Maryland, where he took delivery of the equipment from vendors that he planned to sell to CFC. In July 2007, Sixto left CFC to become an Associate Director at the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs. He, however, continued to engage in his scheme while employed in the Office of the President of the United States. Sixto continued his scheme by changing the mailing address of his corporation to a post office box that automatically re-routed checks mailed by CFC to his home in Frederick, Maryland. In March 2008, after CFC discovered the fraud, Sixto voluntarily resigned from his position at the White House and agreed to repay CFC all his ill-gotten gains and interest. Sixto with the help of his father has returned \$644,884.60 to CFC. CFC has returned the money to USAID.

In announcing today's sentence, U.S. Attorney Taylor and Inspector General Gambatesa praised the hard work and persistence of criminal investigators from the USAID's Office of Inspector General. In addition, they extended their thanks to Criminal Investigator Duncan Templeton and Legal Assistant Lisa Robinson. Finally, they praised the work of Assistant U.S. Attorney Vasu Muthyala, who prosecuted this matter.

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